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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a theory of presumption in public debate based upon Paul Watzlawick's principles of communication. The first section of the paper details briefly the nature of presumption in contemporary argumentation theory. The second section hypothesizes a role for presumption in public debate derived principally from Watzlawick's works. The final section suggests implications of a revised theory of presumption in public debate. (Author/FL)

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Paul Watzlawick's Influence on Presumption in Public Debate

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Persistence and Change: Paul Watzlawick's Influence on Presumption in Public Debate

Every day we are confronted by arguers seeking to persuade us to change. We are urged to purchase new products, vote for particular candidates, or to accept the truthfulness of new information. Argumentation is the study of the logical principles underlying persuasion.[1] No matter what its particular form or occasion, argument is conditioned by systems of explicit rules and implicit conventions which energize debate as an important decision making tool. Scholars have concerned themselves with the logical and behavioral principles of argumentation since the time of Aristotle. An important contribution to this study was made by Richard Whately who reintroduced the concept of presumption to general argumentation. Whately recognized the importance of presumption in helping to determine the duties of arguers and to explain some of the effects of arguments upon audiences. Interest in the pragmatic effects of communicative behavior is also the province of Paul Watzlawick and his associates. Combining the perspectives of a wide range of disciplines, Watzlawick's conclusions about communication are well known to scholars in the field. This essay suggests that Watzlawick's theories are also useful in understanding the process of public debate. My specific purpose is to present a theory of presumption in public debate based upon Watzlawick's principles of communication.

The first section of the paper will briefly detail the nature of presumption in contemporary argumentation theory. The second section will hypothesize a role for presumption in public debate derived principally from the works of Paul Watzlawick. The third and final section will suggest some implications of a revised theory of presumption in public debate.

Presumption in Argumentation Theory

Presumptions are beliefs based upon grounds or reasonable evidence.[2] Presumptions form the basis from which the tendencies and preferences of audiences are predicted. If an audience is believed to hold a particular presumption that is challenged by an opposing arguer, the opposing arguer must overcome the presumption in order to secure adherence to the claim. The precise nature of presumption has been frequently considered by scholars. Whately's Elements of Rhetoric left many unanswered questions about how presumptions are assigned in a dispute and how important presumptions are to the determination of the outcome of a controversy. Argumentation scholars have viewed presumption from one of three perspectives in attempting to assess the importance of presumption in controversy. Presumption is often viewed as (1) an "objective" force in a dispute, acting as an arbitrary inference; (2) an "arbitrary" force, acting as a decision-rule in a policy making perspective; or (3) a "subjective" force, determined by the preferences of a particular audience.

Presumption, as an "objective" force, is believed to act the same way in general argumentation as it does in jurisprudence. The legal doctrine of presumption was developed centuries ago in the Roman judicial system. Legal presumption takes two forms: a rule of evidence and a necessary legal inference.[3] The most familiar inference being, of course, the presumption of innocence. Presumptions, in this perspective, are inferred from either natural or assigned legal rights and are arbitrarily invoked through the function of the argumentative situation rather than discretionarily invoked by arguers or the audience. This perspective compares all argumentative situations to courts of law. If the arguer does not fulfill the burden of proof, the position attacked is presumed to be innocent and no further argument can take place. Malcolm Sillars persuasively argues that this point of view is based on an invalid assumption that legal proof is primarily derived through demonstration.[4] In fact, the process of argumentation in law is far more complex as judges and juries make decisions on a wide variety of bases. An objective view of presumption is also of little use in analyzing public debates. Unlike courts of law, arguers in most controversies may not wait until an opponent has fulfilled a burden of proof before responding. The subject matter of public debate often is conducted over issues where proof is ephemeral: where the choice of alternatives depends upon factors such as the credibility of arguers and assertions about the effects of policies that may not be as rigorously tested as evidence may be tested in a court of law.

Other writers contend that presumption is an "arbitrary" force in a dispute, functioning as a decision-rule clarifying the duties of arguers in specific decision-making situations. This view describes presumption as a mechanism which insures that arguers justify the choice of a particular policy before action is taken, on the basis that there is a presumption in favor of the action of least risk.[5] The most common form of this presumption is the presumption in favor of maintaining the status quo. This perspective assumes decision-making to function as a comparison of policy systems. Changes in policy are proposed and the judge or decision-making body must determine the most desirable policy through its comparison to a competing policy.[6] This theory is not completely helpful in analyzing public debates.

First, a significant amount of public debate takes place in situations where no specific policy proposal is being considered. It is not unusual, outside an academic debate, for many citizens to engage in a public debate over general issues such as abortion, or defense policy, without concerning themselves with specific proposals. The unique genre of public debate where issues of fact, value and policy are simultaneously considered does not lend itself to analysis through traditional descriptions of presumption and the burden of proof. For example, it may be hypothesized that there is not necessarily a presumption in favor of less change: in certain instances groups or individuals may be inclined to believe that change is necessary.[7] In other instances, events may occur to cause a need for change and

there may be significant public pressure in favor of radical reform.

The third and final perspective on presumption is that the concept functions as a "subjective" force in a dispute, determined by the proclivities and preferences of audiences. Presumptions, according to Chaim Perelman, are connected with what an audience considers to be "normal and likely."[8] James McBath suggests that the norms of the group stand until modified by the group.[9] J. Michael Sproule defines presumption as ". . .advantages. . .simultaneously conferred on both sides of a dispute, resulting from. . .audience preferences for particular arguments or sources of information. . ."[10] A similar perspective is offered by Richard Rieke and Malcolm Sillars who locate presumption through the determination of the "momentum" of decision-makers.[11] The concept of inertia is at the center of this view of presumption. According to Perelman,

> /i/nertia makes it possible to rely on the normal, the habitual, the real, and the actual and to attach a value to them, whether it is a matter of an existing situation, an accepted opinion, or a state of regular and continuous development. Change, on the other hand, has to be justified; once a decision has been taken it cannot be changed except for sufficient reason.[12]

If presumption is conceived as a subjective force, determined by the preferences of particular audiences the problem becomes determining which presumptions a particular audience accepts as primary. Audiences, particularly in public controversies, tend to vary in size and their degree of heterogeneity. Furthermore, arguers may attempt to manipulate the definition of particular issues to affect the number of people involved in a dispute. E. E. Schattschneider claims that ". . ./t/he central political fact in a free society is the tremendous contagiousness

of conflict." A conflict is made up of active participants and ". . .the audience that is irresistibly attracted to the scene."[13] This audience plays a major role in the determination of the final outcome of a controversy. Additions and subtractions to the size of the audience supporting particular positions may dictate which side is ultimately triumphant. Arguers recognize and attempt to control audience participation in conflicts. Conflict situations do not remain static. Conflicts are either expanded through being socialized to include more participants or narrowed by being privatized,[14] to keep the number of active participants small. A democratic form of government is often the means used to socialize a conflict, by allowing citizens access to the decision-making structure. While there is no theoretical limit to the number of citizens who could participate in a conflict, the number is limited in practice. Voting behavior illustrates this notion, as far fewer citizens vote then are qualified to do so. The significance of assessing efforts to expand or contract the number of participants in controversies comes from the realization that if the initial strengths of competing arguers were determinative, the outcomes of most disputes would favor whichever side possessed the greatest initial strength. Arguers are sometimes reluctant to enter into controversies when the chances of success are small. They are reluctant to "fight city hall" or to attempt to "buck the system." However, since most conflicts begin without any clear predetermination of the size of the audience or the presumptions such an audience might follow, the arguer must actively attempt to

influence location of presumptions through the effective definition of the relevent issues in a dispute. This process of issue definition is often examined in political science but rarely, if ever, considered by argumentation scholars.

Presumption in Public Debate

Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson, in the Pragmatics of Human Communication,[15] contend that communication has both a "content" and "relationship" function. They write that ". . .communication not only conveys information, but that at the same time it imposes behavior."[16] Traditional explanations of presumption are designed to describe the content of individual issues and very little about how presumption affects the behavior of arguers. It is possible to determine with some predictable success what an audience considers "normal and likely" about certain situations, as long as an audience acts according to the constraints of a "universal audience." For example, it is not unreasonable to expect that an audience might hold a presumption in favor of the existence of God or that the United States should have a strong national defense. Traditional theory is less helpful in assessing how presumption affects the process by which decisions are made and problems solved. In differentiating the report and command functions which are synonymous with the content and relationship functions, Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson write that:

> /t/he report aspect of a message conveys information and is, therefore, synonymous in human communication with the content of the message. It may be about anything that is communicable regardless of whether the particular information is true or

> false, valid, invalid, or undesirable. The command aspect, on the other hand, refers to what sort of a message it is to be taken as, and, therefore, ultimately to the relationship between the communicants.[17]

One common problem with presumption theory is in the difficulty in understanding how important it is in settling disputes. David Zarefsky, for example, contends that presumption serves such practical uses as being a decision rule, a means of allocating argumentative burdens, and as a means of breaking ties.[18] Presumption, in public debate, must have one role as a means of allocating the duties of arguers. This is the essence of the "command" function of presumption.

The existence of a problem or issue necessitates arguers to take some action, either in the form of defining or redefining the salient issues in a dispute or in attempting to control the means by which change is attempted. Presumptions are important in helping to determine the form of the action which takes place to respond to any particular need for change. This assertion about the role of presumption is justified through a brief discussion of the nature of public debate and Watzlawick's theories about the nature of persistence and change.

Controversies are not created by chance. They are either initiated by arguers who perceive some disparity in the allocation of resources or are created by the occurence of some unforseen event which necessitates action. Political scientists Roger Cobb and Charles Elder define an issue as ". . .a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution or position of resources."[19] Individual issues are

not usually considered singularly, but are grouped together into an "agenda" that is deliberated by political or social institutions. Cobb and Elder present a more specific definition of an agenda as:

> /a/ general set of political controversies that will be viewed at any point in time as falling within the range of legitimate concerns meriting the attention of the polity. . .It may also be used to denote a set of concrete, specific, items scheduled for active and serious consideration by a particular institutional decision-making body. Examples would be legislative calendars and the docket of a court.[20]

There is no universal social agenda. Cobb and Elder differentiate systemic from institutional agendas. Institutional agendas consist of the issues considered in formal policy-making channels. The systemic agenda is:

> . . .always. . .more abstract, general, and broader in scope and domain than any given institutional agenda. Moreover, the priorities in this systemic agenda will not necessarily correspond with the priorities in institutional agendas. In fact, there may be considerable discrepency between them. It may be offered as a general hypothesis that the greater the disparity between the two types of agendas, the greater the intensity and frequency of conflict within the political system.[21]

The discrepency between institutional and systemic agendas creates an "inevitable" degree of social conflict in all political systems. As noted earlier, the central fact of political behavior is the attempt to control the definitions of issues and the number of active participants.

The number of participants are often determined by the definition of the conflict and isolation of the salient issues by the active arguers having an interest in the outcome of the controversy. Arguers attempt to define issues in such a way that the conflict is either socialized or privatized, depending upon which outcome is most favorable to the arguers position. The definition of issues is the subject matter

of substantive debate. Favorably defining an issue is the first step in successfully influencing decision-makers. The way that the issue is defined determines how the issue will be perceived by relevent audiences and how the arguer must go about building support for a particular position. E. E. Schattschneider points out that,

> . . .a political conflict is not like an intercollegiate debate in which the opponents agree in advance on a definition of the issues. As a matter of fact, the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power.[22]

Argumentation plays a key role in political decision-making. One example illustrates the role of arguments in shaping the size and definition of issues. After the conclusion of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson travelled to Europe to join other European statesmen in founding the League of Nations. He returned to the United States only to find strong Congressional opposition to American involvement grounded upon the apparently deeply held belief that the United States should avoid foreign entanglements. To overcome the reluctance of the Senate to approve the treaty, Wilson attempted to socialize the conflict by taking his case to the American people. He embarked on a national tour and stressed the threat of future wars and the necessity of American involvement to insure the success of the League. Wilson recognized that he needed to redefine the issue of American participation in the League of Nations in order to overcome the strong presumption against foreign entanglements.

The command function of presumption implies more than simply the duty of an advocate to justify adopting some policy. Arguers in a dispute must also attempt to justify the way that issues are defined,

This is due to the fact that problems become issues in a variety of ways and do not always come about simply because a problem exists. All problems require a "triggering device" to bring the problem to the attention of relevent policy-makers.[23] A triggering device is some intentional or unintentional stimulus which creates an exigence which must be addressed by policy-makers. Cobb and Elder identify four separate triggering devices. First, a party may perceive a disparity in the allocation of resources. Second, a party may create an issue for their own gain. Special interest groups may operate in this manner. Third, an unanticipated event may lead to consideration of an issue. The assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, for example, influenced renewed consideration of the gun control issue. Fourth, a person seeking to act in the public interest may cause the consideration of an issue.[24] Once a problem is perceived as an issue, all interested parties must act to influence the outcome of a dispute. Controversies are fluid in their infancy. They do not take form and shape until arguers perceive the need to argue and define the relevant issues in the dispute.

The command aspect of presumption allows consideration of the processes of persistence and change in argumentation. Persistence and change are inevitable forces of human affairs. Open systems evolve and act to simultaneously maintain their equilibrium and to cope with new inputs or alterations in the systemic components.[25] Even action designed to maintain the status quo requires the ability

to adapt. Systems vary in their capacity for change. This is the result of the differences in the ability of organizations to detect and correct error.

"Organizational learning" is a concept introduced by Chris Argyris to describe the ability of organizations (and individuals) to detect and correct error.[26] Argyris contends that the complexity of social and organizational problems necessitates attention to organizational learning. He points out that,

> there is nothing more problematic than solutions. Some of our most agonizing problems have been triggered by our solutions to slum eradication and urban renewal, by the success of the Labor Movement in achieving income security for workers, by rising expectations consequent to our economic growth, by the unwanted consequences of technological innovations. We begin to suspect that there is no stable state awaiting us over the horizon. On the contrary, our very power to solve problems seems to multiply problems. As a result, our organizations live in economic, political, and technological environments which are predictably unstable. The requirement for organizational learning is not an occasional, sporadic phenomenon, but it is continuous and endemic in our society.[27]

Argyris contends that organizations develop "theories of action" which guide their efforts to change and adapt.[28] Organizational theories of action specify the actions, assumptions, norms and strategies necessary for completing the tasks of an organization. An essential part of an organizational theory of action is the use of presumptions. Organizations become committed to certain beliefs and actions that are difficult to change since these consistent beliefs and actions allow the organization to function predictably even if the individual components are replaced. One example is the military. The military has developed a theory of

action which has been very consistent over the years, allowing the military to function in the same way even with the frequent turnover in personnel. Many of the actions and beliefs of the military seem impervious to change or modification, since change would involve the possible destruction of the characteristics of the military which have been built up over many years of consistent behavior and tradition.

Argyris differentiates "espoused theories" from "theories in use."[29] Organizations possess formal policy statements, rules, job descriptions and organizational charts which make up the espoused theory of the organization. The espoused theory may conflict with the "theory in use." or the actual behavior of the organization. The discrepency between the ideal and the actual is a frequently observed characteristic of organizations. For example, the Atomic Energy Commission (and its successor the Nuclear Regulatory Commission) followed an espoused theory that nuclear power plants should be strictly supervised and that applications for construction permits should be subject to close public and governmental scrutiny. The theory in use, however, was far different. The agency acted to promote nuclear development and used licensing hearings as a public relations device rather than as a means of securing legitimate public input.[30]

It is now possible to return to discussion of the command function of presumption. Organizations, confronted with the need for change, must develop appropriate mechanisms for change. Presumptions, embodied in theories-in-use, make organizations more likely to accept some forms of change in preference to other forms.

Human systems, according to Watzlawick, are characterized by a "constancy of change" within a "fixed range" of behaviors. Watzlawick calls this fixed range of change the "calibration" of the system, and particular changes in calibration as "step functions." Watzlawick illustrates these concepts through their comparison to a furnace thermostat:

> The thermostat is set, or calibrated, at a certain temperature for the room, fluctuations below which will activate the furnace until the deviation is corrected (negative feedback) and the room temperature is again within the calibrated range.[31]

Step functions stabilize and assist a system in adaptation. Watzlawick illustrates this process:

> Lowering the setting on a thermostat reduces the necessity for negative feedback and lightens the work and expense of the furnace. Also, more adaptive effects can be achieved by step functions. The feedback loop of driver-gas pedal-speed of the car has certain limits in each gear, and in order to increase over-all speed or climb a hill, a recalibration (shifting of the gear) is necessary.[32]

Change can therefore be viewed as a necessary and desirable characteristic of systems. This necessity for change is frequently found in political systems.

Once a problem is perceived as important or dangerous, it must be resolved. Policy-makers may choose to ignore a problem or delay implementing a solution, but their decision to do so may be considered a form of change. Arguers attempt to mobilize support for or against an issue through the definition of salient issues in the controversy. Political systems frequently try to narrowly define salient issues because systems are limited in their processing and attention capabilities and tend to be biased in

favor of the exploitation of certain issues and the suppression of others.[33]

In other words, a political system is calibrated in such a way that some issues are more likely to be solved than others. For example, the American political system is probably incapable of completely alleviating poverty, since the nature of the system makes it unlikely that the complete social and political change necessary to insure total economic equality would ever be considered. This realization, of course, motivated the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Lenin. Marx and Lenin sought to recalibrate the system through the substitution of communism for capitalism. They sought this end through the attempt to define the salient issue as being a conflict between the working class and the bourgeois.

This analysis does not imply that systems are biased against change. Instead, systems attempt to control the degree and level of change. Social and political systems are slow to accept new issues or change existing policies. Cobb and Elder correctly note that ". . .there is a strong status quo bias in any existing system, and the legal machinery of that system is designed and operates to reinforce and defend that bias."[34] This inertia is apparent in the gap between systemic and institutional agendas, which often precedes political or social conflict situations. Once an issue has been "triggered" onto the institutional agenda, the organizational command functions of presumptions, work to control change. Political maneuvers such as "log-rolling" and political favors for special

interest groups demonstrate the willingness of institutions to change in certain ways which benefit a certain segment of the population. Institutions also frequently demonstrate their capacity for "anticipated reaction." [35]

Institutions seek to control change to enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Richard Merelman defines legitimacy as "the quality of 'oughtness' that is perceived by the public to inhere in a political system."[36] Seymour Martin Lipset claims that one function of government is to create and maintain the perception that governmental institutions are appropriate for society.[37] Political legitimacy probably does not exist without promotional efforts by government through the educational and communicative processes of decision making.

Merelman contends that legitimacy is maintained through the control and use of political symbols. Symbols are the means used to create social reality. Political institutions nurture symbols which are used to define issues to control the number of participants and the relevent presumptions used in influencing the choice of a particular course of action.

The preceding analysis suggests that public debate is made up of two conflicting forces: the pressure to change as the means to adapt to new information, and the pressure to maintain the characteristics and viability of existing institutions through the manipulation of the degree and levels of change. The command characteristic of presumption constitutes the beliefs and actions

which are invoked when the existence of some issue or problem requires some action to be taken to remedy the problem. These presumptions, often found in "theories-in-use," imply that institutions are more likely to solve some problems rather than others and attempt to control the degree and level of change that is undertaken.

The final subject to be considered here is the nature of change and how the need of policy-makers to control change affects their argumentative strategies. Both Argyris and Watzlawick divide change into two types. Watzlawick describes these types of change as first order and second order change.[38]

First order change occurs within a system without altering the structure of the system. It utilizes the characteristics of a system to do more or less of the same thing. For example, speeding up a car within the range of a single gear. First order change is effective as long as the desired result can be achieved within a set range of common behaviors. Watzlawick describes first order change as "logical" change.[39] He derives this notion from the practice of psychiatry where problems are treated using the logical and predictable methods of psychiatric treatment. Argyris describes a similar phenomenon within the context of organizational learning which he describes as "single-loop learning," where ". . .members of the organization respond to changes in the internal and external environments of the organization by detecting errors which they correct so as to maintain the central features of the organizational theory-in-use."[40]

The essential ingredient of first order change or single-loop learning is the motivation to act in such a way to preserve the relevent theories-in-use followed by the organization. Change, if it must come about, should come through highly controlled means, so that the legitimacy of the institution is not seriously threatened or undermined. Watzlawick presents several common forms of first order change.

The first form is the denial that a problem exists. At all levels of interaction, from personal to governmental, one way of coping with change is to avoid it. This tactic illustrates the attempt to utilize the natural presumption against consideration of a problem not yet recognized. For example, Patrick Moynihan advised the Nixon Administration to follow a policy of "benign neglect" towards the poor with the hope that the problems of the poor would eventually be solved by the private sector. Similarly, the French government and aristocracy denied the existence of the legitimate grievances of the poor prior to the French Revolution. The use of this strategy requires the arguer to adopt a simplistic view of the world, because the recognition of the complexity of problems might threaten the entire set of values and presumptions which undergird the theory-in-use of the organization. Watzlawick contends that denial of a problem results in two effects: acknowledgement of the problem by other people or organizations is seen as "bad" behavior; and the problem itself may be compounded through its mishandling.[41] The governmental responses to anti-Vietnam sentiments may illustrate both these effects. Anti-war

protestors were treated like criminals, the government continued to issue optimistic reports about military successes despite considerable evidence to the contrary, and the failure to acknowledge the opposition to the war compounded the vigor of opposition to the war effort.

A second form of first-order change occurs when action is taken when it should not be.[42] Watzlawick points to the frequent number of situations where people believe that there is a solution for an insoluable or non-existent problem. He describes this behavior as the "Utopia Syndrome." The Utopia Syndrome takes three forms. The first form occurs when people blame themselves for being unable to fulfill a utopian goal. Rather than recognizing that a goal is unattainable, people believe themselves to be inadequate. Watzlawick contends that the Utopia Syndrome is frequently associated with social alienation, drug abuse, and divorce, among other social problems. A second form is found in procrastination, where individuals put off attempting to meet a utopian goal. Some people adhere to the myth that certain goals (e.g. happiness in marriage) can be accomplished without sacrifice or discomfort. The third variation of the Utopia Syndrome is ". . .a moral, righteous stance based on the conviction of having found the truth and sustained by the resulting missionary responsibility of changing the world."[43] This behavior may be similar to that of Eric Hoffer's The True Believer. The true believer blames others for his or her failures and tends to create utopian solutions for problems without

regard to the viability of the solution. Watzlawick contends that individuals who try but fail to construct solutions grounded on a utopian set of premises tend to blame the failure on the intervention of outside factors, rather than on the premises themselves. Watzlawick provides two examples:

> the Maoists argue, if after more than half a century the Soviet brand of Marxism has not managed to create the ideal, classless society, it is because the pure doctrine has fallen into impure hands, and not because there might be something inherently wrong with Marxism. The same stance is familiar in unproductive research products, when the attempted solution is more money, a bigger project - - in short, "more of the same."[44]

If a policy maker places too much faith in a particular presumption or set of presumptions, the utopia syndrome might occur. There is a common tendency in governments, for example, to justify increasing government spending or regulation on the basis that the problem could be solved through increased intervention. Rejection of that belief would necessarily lead to a questioning of the "theory-in-use" and the very premises used to construct such policies.

The final example of first order change is when the wrong solution at the wrong level is attempted.[45] Attempting a solution at the wrong level is often the cause of paradoxical situations, where "logical" solutions are inadequate to solving a problem. Paradoxical situations are common: sexual difficulties, treatment of mental illness and attempts to motivate students to learn are examples provided by Watzlawick. Attempting change at the wrong level comes about when the individual or organization fails to recognize that the logical solution to a problem will not result in

a desired effect. For example, when nuclear power opponents argued during the 1960's that nuclear power was not economically competitive with other energy forms, the AEC and private industry responded by calling for the creation of more plants, to take advantage of economies of scale. This solution had almost the opposite effect. More plants not only did not make nuclear energy cheaper but caused greater public opposition and efforts to delay construction, which increased the cost. Similarly, increasing military setbacks in Vietnam caused the United States to commit more troops to attempt to win the war. Rather than having the desired effect, increasing the number of troops actually caused a paradox: more troops created a more cumbersome military force that was unsuited to fighting a jungle war as well as leading to more casualties. A paradoxical situation may occur, therefore, when decision-makers become so committed to a "theory-in-use" that they are unable to recognize the shortcomings of their perspective.

First order change takes at least three forms, as arguers attempt to limit change through control of the mechanisms of change. It is obvious that these tactics of first order change are often associated with the actions of the status quo where limited change is frequently preferable to unlimited change.

There is, of course, no guarantee that first order change will effectively resolve issues or problems. Watzlawick contends that first order change often exacerbates problems. Argyris makes a similar contention about single loop learning.[46] The main advantage

of first order change lies in the ability to deal with problems where change can be accomplished without disrupting the attitudes, actions, and presumptions held by the decision-maker. There are, however, situations where "logical changes" are unsuccessful in solving problems. Some problems are so complex that efforts at minimal change fail to relieve the pressure for change. In many societies, the presence of apparently irresolvable problems might lead to social breakdown or the overthrow of the government. American society demonstrates the capacity for more extensive change when it is sometimes required. This form of change is described by Watzlawick as "second order change," and by Argyris as "double-loop learning."[47] Second order change occurs when an unforseen solution is used to resolve a previously irresolute problem. Second order change effectively substitutes one set of presumptions, or theories-in-use, for another set. It implies more than simply the ability of an arguer to successfully fulfill the burden of proof. Second order change implies that the problem may only be solved by using an entirely new set of premises. Second order change is often spontaneous and unexpected, and serves to redefine a situation by elminating previous definitions of issues and corresponding presumptions.

Second order change involves the ability to "reframe" the definition of reality. Watzlawick defines reframing as the

> means to change the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the "facts" of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changes its entire meaning.[48]

Reframing changes the meaning or interpretation of facts, and not the facts themselves. Human beings create classes of objects as the means of categorizing experiences and perceptions. The assignment of an object to a class creates a "reality" for the subject. Once a fact has been reframed, or assigned to another class, it is unlikely that a person could ever return to accepting the prior classification.

Reframing is analagous to E. E. Schattschneider's concept of "redefinition."[49] Reframing is necessary to overcome the natural presumptions built up by the development of controversies. Where a solution has not been achieved through normal means, reframing must occur to break the "log jam." The ability to "see things in another light" is a common human experience.

Reframing may be either intentional or unintentional. Watzlawick provides an example of intentional reframing by citing the example of the "Trollope Ploy" used by the Kennedy Administration during the Cuban Missle Crisis of 1962.[50] The American government deliberately confused the order of formal and informal messages received from the Soviet government, ignoring a belligerent formal message while responding to an earlier, informal and concilliatory message. This action reframed the situation, making it almost impossible for the Soviet government not to accept a compromise. Another example occured when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Premier Menachem Begin met face to face. Their meeting destroyed the argument often used by the Arabs that Israel was a "non-existent" country.

The meeting of the two leaders thus reframed the situation and created a new situation where the operant theory-in-use had to include acceptance of the reality of Israel.

Reframing may also be unintentional. Unexpected events may serve to reframe situations. The crash of an airliner may reframe the belief that airplanes are presumed to be a safe form of transportation. The bombing of Pearl Harbor reframed the presumption regarding the advisability of American involvment in a world peace keeping body. A more recent example was the accident at Three Mile Island which was more significant for shattering the belief that nuclear power could be presumed safe than for any number of actual deaths resulting from radiation emmissions.

Change may thus result from unexpected events which occur independently of any argumentation that takes place in a decision-making situation. Second order change is the means which exist in public debate situations to redefine problems and replace ineffective theories-in-use. Second order change does not necessarily happen frequently. First order change may often be sufficient to solve problems and maintain the legitimacy of a system. Some problems, however, can only be solved through radical change, which necessitates the reframing of the presumptions guiding the actions of decision-makers.

Implications of a "Command Function" Theory of Presumption

The theories of Paul Watzlawick and Chris Argyris help clarify the process of public debate. Presumption may have two functions in public debate: a "report" function, which indicates how audiences perceive particular issues, and a "command" function, which indicates how decision-makers act when confronted with a situation which requires them to take some action.

This view of presumption may be described as a contention that presumption serves as a decision-rule "grounded" in the behaviors of decision-makers. It goes beyond the view of presumption expressed by Richard Rieke and Malcolm Sillars as being located in the "momentum," or "tendencies" of decision-makers. Presumptions are located through the analysis of the actions of arguers. The location of presumption "against the proposition being argued,"[51] may function well in describing the behavior of individuals toward arguments about specific issues, but does not account for the inherent need for organizations to change and adapt. The behavior of organizations in solving problems is much more complex than simply choosing to accept or not accept a partuclar argument put forth to them. There is always a question about which issues will be considered by the decision-maker, since not all issues are equally likely to appear on either an institutional or systemic agenda; there are questions about how an issue will be defined, since the very definition of an issue implies quite a lot about the way arguers will behave; and there are questions about how an organization will

attempt to resolve a problem that requires some solution. Previous theories of presumption provide little guidance in assessing how presumptions influence the actions of arguers.

There is no attempt to imply that this analysis completes the task of outlining a theory of argumentation in public debate. A comprehensive theory can only result from the examination of many scholars who are willing to modify or even discard traditional perspectives that are insufficient in explaining the unique phenomenon of public debate. Only when researchers begin to treat public debate differently from academic and legal debate, can any real analytic breakthroughs take place.

NOTES

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[4]Malcolm Sillars, "Audiences, Social Values and The Analysis of Argument," Speech Teacher 22 (1973): 296.

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[6]Ibid.

[7]Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, and Richard Fisch, Change (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1974).

[8]Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric translated by John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 71.

[9]James McBath, Argumentation and Debate, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 8.

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[11]Richard Rieke and Malcolm Sillars, Argumentation and the Decision Making Process (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), p. 162.

[12]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 106.

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[14]Ibid., Chapter 1.

[15]Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson, Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967).

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[17]Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[18]David Zarefsky, "A Reformulation of the Concept of Presumption," paper presented at the Central States Speech Association Convention, April 7, 1972.

[19]Roger Cobb and Charles Elder, Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of the Issue Agenda (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1975), p. 82.

[20]Ibid., p. 14.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Schattschneider, p. 68.

[23]Cobb and Elder, pp. 82-83.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, Chapters 1-2. Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, pp. 1-31.

[26]Chris Argyris and Daniel Schon, Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

[27]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[28]Ibid., p. 10.

[29]Ibid., pp. 10-12.

[30]Steven Ebbin and Raphael Kasper, Citizen Groups and the Nuclear Power Controversy: Uses of Scientific and Technological Information (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1974).

[31]Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson. p. 147.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Cobb and Elder, p. 120.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid., p. 10.

[36]Richard Merelman, "Learning and Legitimacy," American Political Science Review 60 (1966): 548.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, pp. 13-28.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Argyris and Schon, p. 18.

[41]Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch., pp. 31-40.

[42]Ibid., pp. 47-62.

[43]Ibid., p. 51.

[44]Ibid., p. 54.

[45]Ibid., pp. 62-73.

[46]Argyris and Schon, p. 18.

[47]Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[48]Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, p. 95.

[49]Schattschneider, Chapter 1.

[50]Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, pp. 107-109.

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